

# ***Bringing the Tutors to the Students: An Investigative Study of WAC Tutoring in Second Language Contexts***

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## **ABSTRACT**

The number of English as a second language (ESL) students attending universities in the United States has increased during the 2011-2012 school year (Hagedorn & Lee, 2005), with, for the first time since 2001, more undergraduate international students than graduate students in institutions across the country (Davis, 2012). Given the wide range of backgrounds and English proficiencies represented by this group, their varying needs are frequently not being fully met, particularly in reading and writing, two areas that are often weak in ESL students but linked to academic success (Matsuda, 2004).

Regarding writing, much research has shown that ESL students need feedback on various aspects of writing to improve (Ferris, 2009), ranging from content, to organization, to linguistic features. However, giving feedback on each of these components may not be possible for writing teachers, due to time demands. Alternatively, peer tutors may effectively work with ESL students to help them understand academic writing expectations in the U.S. and meet said expectations.

This investigative study looked at a newly-developed ESL WF program at Brigham Young University, focusing on the perceptions of the various stake holders (students, writing teachers, and Fellows themselves) regarding the success of the ESL WF program. Via pre- and post-program surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, the perceptions of the students were obtained. Via non-structured interviews, the perceptions of the teachers and Fellows themselves were obtained. From these data, themes that looked at the aspects of the program that were successful and that need to be improved were developed and analyzed, primarily from an administrative perspective.

Overall, this study found that ESL students greatly appreciated having the individualized tutoring provided by the ESL WF program. Students valued the feedback given by the tutor on content, organization, and grammatical issues, and found the follow-up conferences with the tutor to be a great asset as the tutors could explain intended meaning. Additionally, tutors felt more comfortable negotiating intended meaning with the Fellow, which may be more effective at helping students develop the needed schema to apply Fellow suggestions to future writing assignments. However, much of the success of the program relies on the individual Fellow, with Fellows who neglect duties or provide feedback that conflicts with that of the teacher creating problems for students. Administrators should hire and train tutors accordingly. Teachers agreed that the Fellows generally were an asset to their classes, and the Fellows themselves appreciated the opportunity to work one-on-one with ESL students, feeling that this program afforded them experience that would make them more employable in the future.